

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 0167

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, GT, BH, UK
SUBJECT; PUBLIC DEBATE ON BELIZE DISPUTE

1. DURING THE PAST WEEK OR SO PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE CURRENT EFFORTS TO FUND A SOLUTION TO THE UK-Guatemalan DISPUTE HAS CONTINUED UNABATED IN PRESS AND IN PUBLIC MEETINGS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. PREMIER PRICE IN POLITICAL RALLIES IN OUTLYING TOWNS AND IN BELIZE CITY HAS CONINUED TO INVEIGH AGAINST CESSION OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA; OPPOSITION PARTY SPOKESMEN IN A SERIES OF UDP RALLIES ARE STILL DEMANDING RESIGNATION OF PRICE GOVERNMENT FOLLOWED BY A 10 YEAR MORATORIUM ON INDEPENDENCE. BASED ON TURNOUT FOR AND RESPONSE TO PUBLIC RALLIES IN BELIZE CITY, BOTH THEMES ARE GENERATING A FAIR AMOUNT OF POPULAR INTEREST.

2. THIS WEEK GOVERNMENT RADIO HAS BEEN REPORTING THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE CARICOM FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING NOW BEING HELD IN BELMOPAN IS TO RECEIVE PREMIER PRICE'S BRIEFING ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS RE BELIZE. GOVERNOR MCENTEE ASSURED ME THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS SIMPLY TO TRANSACT NORMAL CARICOM BUSINESS,
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AND HE SEEMED A BIT EMBARRASSED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH THE MEETING IS BEING PUBLICIZED HERE. HE CONCEDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE BELIZE DISPUTE WOULD FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS AMONG THE VISITING MINISTERS.

3. THE SUBJECT OF U.S. POLICY AS IT AFFECTS THE BELIZE

DISPUTE HAS BEEN RECEIVING ATTENTION LATELY, ESPECIALLY IN THE OPPOSITION PRESS. LAST WEEK'S BEACON HEADLINED GUATEMALAN EFFORTS TO OBTAIN F-5 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT FROM THE U.S. A WEEKEND EDITORIAL IN THE REPORTER SAW EVIDENCE IN A RECENT REPLY BY UK FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN TO A QUESTION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT "THE MEN AT THE WHITE HOUSE AND FOGGY BOTTOM HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR SOME ACTION WHICH THE UK GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO TAKE." EDITORIAL WENT ON TO SAY "A FAIR CONCLUSION FOR US TO DRAW IS THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WOULD PREFER TO SEE AN IMPOSED SETTLEMENT - ONE WHICH WOULD GO PART-WAY IN SATISFYING THE GUATEMALAN CLAIM. FROM THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE A QUICK SURGICAL OPERATION WITH LOTS OF HEALING DOLLAR-BILLS WOULD PROVIDE A MORE SATISFACTORY SITUATION THAN ENDLESS DIALOGUE INTERSPERSED WITH BURSTS OF SABRE RATTLING. THIS, WE ARE CONVINCED, IS EXACTLY THE GUATEMALAN VIEW ALSO. BUT THIS IS AN ILLUSION BROUGHT ABOUT BY TOO MUCH MAP-GAZING. AN IMPOSED SETTLEMENT WOULD NOT PROVIDE THE PEACE AND TRANQUILITY WHICH THE UNITED STATES AND THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA ANTICIPATE. IT WOULD NOT BE A CLEAN SURGICAL CUT WHICH U.S. POLICY MAKERS PUT SO MUCH FAITH IN. IT WOULD BE AN OPEN WOUND WHICH DOLLAR BILLS WOULD BE UNABLE TO HEAL..."

4. COMMENT; PREMIER PRICE'S STRATEGY APPEARS TO BE THAT OF DISASSOCIATING HIMSELF IN ADVANCE FROM WHATEVER PROPOSAL FOR SETTLING THE DISPUTE MAY EMANATE FROM CURRENT CONFIDENTIAL

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NEGOTIATIONS. ALSO, HE MAY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT A CAMPAIGN AGAINST TERRITORIAL CESSION MIGHT AFFORD HIM A POSSIBLE MEANS OF REGAINING POPULAR SUPPORT. THE STRIDENCY OF THE OPPOSITION'S RESPONSE SUGGESTS THAT THEY ARE BEGINNING TO FEAR THAT THE PREMIER'S TACTICS MIGHT BE SUCCESSFUL. GAWF

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